

# UPSTAIRS BULLETIN

Volume 18 - No. 3

December 20, 1978

Chicago, Illinois

An Educational Group

ONE CHRISTMAS was so much like another, in those years around the seatown corner now and out of all sound except the distant speaking of the voices I sometimes hear a moment before sleep, that I can never remember whether it snowed for six days and six nights when I was twelve or whether it snowed for twelve days and twelve nights when I was six.

- A Child's Christmas in Wales.

MY BEST of wished for your Christmases and your Happy New Years, your long lives and true prosperities. Worth twenty pound good if they are delivered as I send them. Remember? Here's a final prescription added, "To be taken for life".

Doctor Marigold's prescriptions  
(1865)

\* \* \* \* \*

## THE 'NUT' SEASON

The Pittsburg Ballet will be dancing "Nutcracker" in Waukegan shortly before the holidays and LAUREN ROUSE and NANCY GLYNN will surely be in their production. Here in Chicago RAY CHEAPPATTA, JOAN GREGOR, JOHN SHARP and MARIA BALABAN are all dancing in the local 'Nut'. CAROLYN COWIE is dancing in Mme Darvosch's production in Connecticut - ADAM HEILMANN is in a 'Nut' in Denver Colorado - JOHN DENNIS is surely in the Dallas 'Nut' with Scibine. One thing is absolutely certain JAMES JAMIESON is hard at work on his in Wilmington and one can gamble one's life on LOYD TYGETT's in Huntsville. I seem to remember that PHYLIS DE WEESE was doing the same in Middletown. Every village now has it's own production even if they do not have the dancers for one. It does get rather monotonous and it would seem someone might think of "HANSEL & GRETEL", "DER KRISTOFLEIN", THE LITTLEST ANGEL", "THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL" or "AMAL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS", or any other of a dozen more

interesting things. The 'Nut' is done because there is little or no creation involved in putting it on stage. That coupled with its appeal to the non-informed ballet public.

As a change of pace CHRISTOHER ADAMS is in the Boston Ballet's "Cinderella". LORETTA ROZEK was in for a Thanksgiving holiday and is extremely happy in her new Florida home. ERNIE FLATT stoped for a short visit between New York and Los Angeles - success had not changed him one bit. He is involved in two New York shows coming up this season. MICIALA CONTRERASS (Michelle Murphy) now is dancing in the beautiful Jose Molina Spanish Dance Company around the area. Although we see her Mother (MARIE MURPHY) often we have not seen Michele since she left the school. She is one of the many second generation students that have grown in our school.

\* \* \* \* \*

I wonder how many people remember that very popular TV show - "Polka-go-round" that went on for several years here in Chicago. Felix Sadowski was its choreographer who drew heavily on our school for his dancers. On the cover of their record album is a picture of four girls - all of whom studied at the school - ADRIENNE FLIEGEL, KAREN ROSE, MARIANNE CROCETTI and REENEE SADOWSKI. Others who worked in the group called "Chaine Dancers" were PATRICK HEIM, JOHN WIDMER, KAROLY BARTA and I believe JUANITA GARBER. There were others that I cannot now remember. What brought this all to my mind was a short item in Kup's column in the Sun Times that probably many did not see - "The death of Felix Sadowski, apparently the result of the severe beating he suffered at the hands of two robbers in the lobby of his building a few days earlier, has a legion of friends wearing their hearts at half staff. Felix was prominent in TV and movie circles as well as Polish American activities. \*\*

## "DANSE CLASSIQUE"

Immediately after the Insull crash in the 30's there existed a feeling akin to panic as to where the dancers at the Opera might seek work. True, there were many jobs in night clubs, Fair Shows, pageants, carnivals and Theatre lines but Opera dancers were not entirely suited to that type of work. Or more likely they felt a bit above that kind of work. At the Opera our Ballet Master consistently told us that we were artists and reminded us that we should always behave as such.

Because, I, in off seasons and even before I was engaged at the Opera, had been employed as an usher, as a fire guard, or as a stage door man at the State Lake Theatre, then a vaudeville house....I was known in the William Morris Office. That office was the seat next to God in vaudeville at that time. They booked all acts for the circuits from coast to coast. I rather doubt that anybody in that sacred office knew my real name - but they did know me as "Pinkie", the center aisle usher at the State Lake.

It was with this flimsy influence that I approached the Morris Office for an audition for a group of Opera dancers who thought they wished to form an act for vaudeville. I was informed that on a certain day of each week they held auditions for new acts and if we wished to come we were more than welcome.

Thus encouraged and after much deliberation our group consisting of Harriet Lundgren, Bentley Stone, Sandra Davis and myself appeared at the Joe Keith Studio where the tryout was to be held. There we met Teresa Randolph, also from the Opera intending to audition for a single. Because she was from the Opera those in charge considered us all as a unit which was fine with us. Faced with a room full of aspiring vaudevillians my group (probably from cold feet) refused to perform unless the room was cleared. This was an unheard of request and there were a few bad moments. However the room was cleared, not without unpleasant remarks from those being removed and our showing commenced. We came with a nucleus of dances we had performed on other programs. Stone had an excellent "French Sailor Dance", Sandra and I danced a popular "Gay Ninety" number to the Maple Leaf Rag, choreographed by Stone. Teresa came well

prepared with several dances and Harriet, if I remember correctly, danced a classical point dance.

The showing went well and the officials were impressed. An agent was put in charge of our group and we were given instructions as to what the Morris Office expected from us. We were given two weeks to plan the act before our first showing in a theater. This meant a great amount of work preparing dances, the costumes and especially the orchestrations. Fortunately we were assigned a very competent accompanist - Thelma. She could play anything from jazz to classical and well. We sat up many nights marking the orchestrations under her instructions.

Late in November they gave us our first engagement (at half salary until such a time as they felt we were 'broke in') in Green Bay Wisconsin. In bitter cold weather in an open car we drove the night before to arrive for a morning rehearsal. Our driver was Pall Mall, also an act billed as the Pittsburgh Eskimo. The costumes and scenery (which we had not seen) were in a trailer. We had been instructed that by all means we must act as if we had been working regularly. When the scenery was unfurled it had been hopelessly water soaked and was unusable. We were embarrassed beyond words but the sympathetic stage crew pitched in and found us appropriate drops in their place.

Our act was to be between fifteen and twenty minutes long depending on audience reaction. There were seven dances which required eighteen costume changes. For this engagement two new dances were added - "Sleepy Time Down South" a tap dance for Stone and two girls and a group dance for the end to "Mood Indigo" - a real 'flash' number with us all doing fouette pirouettes at the finish in strobe lights. Facing an unknown audience can always be a nerve wracking experience and more so for us who had only faced Opera audiences.

The first show went off well with us modestly racing back and forth to our dressing rooms for changes. The second and third shows found us discarding all modesty and changing in the wings. By the end of the third day we all felt as if we had made the grade and did not mind the cold ride back to Chicago. Traveling again during the night to avoid another hotel bill.

The Green Bay Press Gazette the next day gave at least half its review to "Danse Classique" saying that, "in the first dance three girls poised on their toes during the entire number. The dancing was graceful and well received. The settings and costumes in the act were very clever and colorful while the dancing throughout was excellent".

When we got back to Chicago the act went the rounds of many local theaters - the Ritz - the Rivera - Berwyn - Cicero and all the suburbs and finally to the Kedzie. By this time our management had seen fit to add a singer - a gangster's moll - supposedly to add more class. Each engagement they wanted something different - try a tap dance - try this - try that and finally an acrobatic dance. And here the finger pointed at me and in a few hours notice "Juba" was installed. At the end of this dance I had to kick the back of my head fourteen times with both feet. This with heavily accented beats from the drum. "Juba" proved to be a jinx dance as the orchestra never once played the correct cuts in the music. And I suffered between shows flat on my back in the dressing room with my feet in the air.

When we reached the Kedzie Theater we shared the bill with a strange mixture of acts - mostly bad. The theater itself was great and we still remember it with great fondness. (What ever has happened to this marvelous theater?) This was the showing with the new singer and by this time the management had changed our name to "Rhythm of the Dance". Variety's review did not mention the singer but was favorable to our work. Actually the review was amusing - "Opening were the "Three Perculators", two gals and a man, colored. They hoofed with gusto but no distinction; and sang entirely without merit. If it must be, should stick to fast foot work. Helen Carlson got away badly here due to some jumbled props for her perch and web turn. Should eliminate the opening try tumbling, which is meaningless. Best work is the body-twisting bits on the web. Joan, Jerry and Billy all dressed nicely and have one or two favorable moments in their dancing act. They, too, are trying to talk and sing. They shouldn't. Tai Ling Sing is a Chinese gentleman who not only sings but plays the fiddle and dances at the sametime. Nothing here. "Rhythm of the Dance" shapes up nicely on the flash. It's especially oke on the excellent costuming. Three girls and two men for ballet and hoofing routines. A touch of modernism in some

of the interludes that is figured as something of a novelty for the smaller time. It takes courage to produce acts these days, even on short coin. Act appears ready for anything in the midwest." This was not too bad for us in Variety - known to be tough and hard on new acts.

After all the Chicago area engagements at half price we were sent to Mason City Iowa with a major bill. Along with the Stanley Brothers we had a typical vaudeville bill of acrobats, jugglers and animal acts. In our act when a zipper stuck it was very frantic because of our many and quick costume changes. One night Stone had a zipper stick and he was in hysterics and Sandy and I had to practically beat him into submission before we got it to work - just making his entrance. Other wise this was a very nice date and we began to feel we were already a part of vaudeville. This was late spring and on our return we were informed that on the next engagement to Gary Indiana we would receive full salaries.

Totally elated and with fresh enthusiasm we arrived in Gary and booked into the finest Hotel in town. The theatre was no palace but with our improvements -carpets on the floor - our dressing tables primped up with colorful clothes and makeup neatly laid out in rows - we were at least putting on a good front. It took much more imagination to put on the dog when we arrived on that dreadful stage. The stage floor had holes large enough for the end of a toe shoe to sink down into. The first dance "The Pizzicato Polka" began the act with three girls in short tutus dancing daintily and precisely around the holes. They were greeted by several vulgar mouth-sounds from the low-brows in the front row. This certainly did not help the ladies aplomb for the rest of the dance. From then on it was anybodies game but the following numbers had more appeal for the Gary audience. The balance of the week went off better. We enjoyed the Hotel and we ate better than we were accustomed to on other engagements. After the last show going to the box office to collect our salaries was the final blow. We were actually paid in nickels, dimes and quarters - at half salary. All arguments met deaf ears and we were told we could take it or leave it. Had we not arrived in Gary with some money we would never have been able to pay our way out and back to Chicago. Need I say more? This was the end of "Danse Classique" or "Rhythm of the Dance" - This

covering a period of eight months - WE HAD HAD IT!

We found out later that this was a game with the local bookers - They were getting cheap acts as long as they were willing to work this way. Flattery and hopeful praises lead one on and on...under the supposition that they were being seen by important bookers.

Harry's New York Bar (where we appeared on day) ran one entire year not paying a cent to an act on the supposition they were being seen by important bookers. The night-club union - AGVA - was as crooked as the employers who cheated the aspiring acts. This was one of the forgotten happenings we all lived through in the depression years.

\* \* \* \* \*

*May your Christmas gifts be*

**LOVE, JOY AND PEACE**



*Seasons Greetings*

**Stone/Camryn Dance Studio**